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NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

No. DCXXVIII.

MARCH, 1908.

THE TRUTH ABOUT GERMAN EXPANSION.

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TO THE UNITED STATES.

ESPECIALLY during the last two years it has been noticed by those interested in the world's development that a number of papers of Western Europe have circulated reports that the independence of the two small states of Holland and Belgium is jeopardized in consequence of the war spirit and lust for territory alleged to exist in Germany. The reports to which I refer seek also to interest the American people by asserting that the underlying reason for Germany's purpose to acquire the Netherlands arises out of her ambition to possess territory in the Western Hemisphere. The island of Curaçao in the Caribbean Sea is pointed to as a constant object of our keen solicitude. Should Germany, it is stated, succeed in annexing the Netherlands, her colonies naturally will pass with the mother country.

In an article printed in the number of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW for May, 1906, "The Phantom Peril of German Emigration and South-American Settlements," I have already given a clear *exposé* of Germany's policy in the Southern Hemisphere, and proved that there is not a shadow of truth in the attacks directed against it by political calumniators.

Even politicians who cannot ignore the conspicuous fact that the German Emperor is an enthusiastic advocate of the Peace

Movement; that the German Government for thirty-seven years—that is, ever since the great national struggle of the years 1870-1871—has striven always for peace, and always has been less active than any other country in the direction of expansion; that the German nation has no other wish than pacifically to mind its own business; even such politicians frequently believe, or profess to believe,—in spite of Germany's love of peace, which, ever since the German Empire came into existence, has been demonstrated by history to be an incontestable fact—that this peace-loving Germany ultimately, by force of circumstances or logical development, will be coerced into annexing Holland and the Flemish part of Belgium, containing the great port of Antwerp.

Usually it has been stated that Germany has an annual increase in population of 800,000, that these new masses must be supported by manufactories, and that the German Empire will thus be forced, with or against its will, into expansion, in order to procure the raw material and to establish the requisite markets for its industrial growth. The annexation of Holland and Flemish Belgium, containing Antwerp, is described as a mere preliminary necessary to make possible such measures of expansion. Germany must enlarge its maritime basis, and should have control of the Lower Rhine and its harbors. To the alien, these arguments may seem plausible enough. Whoever is acquainted with existing conditions, however, knows that, though seemingly plausible, this is not the truth.

In the first place, it is not true that colonial expansion is a necessity for Germany, resulting from its industrial growth. The impetus given to German commerce and German manufactures is to be ascribed far more to the increase in the buying capacity of other nations—England, France, Russia or America—than to all the German colonies combined. Germany needs no colonies; what she wants is merely free competition on all seas, the open door, and the right to co-operate freely on an equal footing with all other commercial and industrial nations, in opening up new and as yet unopened districts and markets. Hence the principle of the open door is the leading motive of the foreign policy pursued by Germany. It is the red thread that winds itself through the Eastern-Asiatic, the Oriental and the Moroccan policy of the German Empire. The high quality of all German products obviates the necessity of unfair preferences accruing to political

power. All they need is a fair chance to compete on equal terms with other countries. The world is large enough, and rich enough, in still dormant possibilities, to admit of a pacific co-operation by all nations in this great work.

It is equally absurd to allege that the annexation of Holland and Antwerp is a necessary preliminary to our colonial expansion. To have the harbors and ports of the Rhine controlled by foreign Powers, naturally, would be insupportable to Germany. The entire railroad and waterway system of Germany radiates towards the two main commercial centres, Bremen and Hamburg, which, as current development has shown, are fully equal to meet all demands of traffic, and are capable of further growth. The Rhine, it is true, is an important and, for the highly developed Rhine Province, an indispensable waterway. The export interests along the Rhine always naturally will prefer the shorter and cheaper all-water route on the Rhine to the more expensive and circuitous railway route *via* Bremen. It is, however, a matter of complete indifference to Germany whether the vessels on the Rhine, carrying the products of the German Rhine countries to the ocean, on their journey pass along banks under the dominion of Germany, Holland or Belgium, for the traffic on the Rhine is free of all payments, obstacles or restrictions, and could not be more free even if Germany controlled the adjacent districts. And this freedom has been secured abundantly by the so-called "Rhine-Traffic-Treaties," entered into and upon by the interested states.

The ocean commerce, also, in no wise suffers from the transportation of the Rhine products on the Rhine, as these German goods are reshipped on German ocean steamers from the ports at the mouths of the river.

Hence the reasons which supposedly would impel Germany to annex the two neighboring states are deduced from false premises.

If we view the matter more closely, however, and, independently of the particular arguments which I advanced in the introduction, give consideration to the situation of these three states in general, we find that no reasons exist why Germany should be solicitous for annexation, or even for a union of economic interests. On the other hand, there are quite a number of reasons why Germany should oppose annexation or a union of economic interests. Holland produces none of the raw material required

by Germany for her manufactures. Belgium produces merely coal and iron, which is the specific raw material of which Germany possesses a superfluity, and which is practically inexhaustible. Moreover, the coal and iron mines of Belgium have led to a splendid development of the iron industry of that country, which is protected by a tariff, and manufactures for its own consumption and principally for trans-Atlantic export. If the German-Belgium boundaries were to be wiped out, the products of this industry would depress the German internal market, which, at present, is controlled by the German iron industry. Conversely, the German competitive products would depress the Belgian internal market. Thus, German as well as Belgian manufacturers possibly may desire an increased tariff—certainly not its abolition. The same condition that obtains in the iron market prevails in other competitive industries of the two countries.

In consequence, no one in Germany or Belgium considers a tariff-union of the two countries feasible or desirable; and annexation, of which a certain group of foreign political writers would like to make a German bugaboo to frighten Belgium, as a matter of fact, is not seriously contemplated in either state.

The situation is the same in the case of Holland. Holland also does not produce any raw material which German factories could use. Holland is a free-trade country, whose tariff is dependent upon financial, not protective, considerations; and, inasmuch as Germany can derive advantages from the markets of Holland, no tariff-union is desirable. On the contrary, German agriculture stands in great need of the tariff wall between the two countries.

Holland is an agrarian country which imports grain and exports cattle. Unrestricted importation of cattle from Holland, which is now precluded by German sanitary protective measures, would drive the East-German cattle from the markets of the thickly populated West, and seriously injure the agricultural interests of Eastern Germany.

Several years ago, when the boldly conceived canal project of the Prussian Government, which designed to connect the East of Germany with the West, was submitted for approval to the German Diet, the strong conservative party and the other representatives of agrarian interests successfully fought the bill, because they believed such a waterway would favor the influx of agrarian

products, and thus impair the agricultural interests of the East. The same objections, in a much higher degree, would militate against a removal of tariff boundaries between Germany and Holland.

It may be argued, of course, that, in the absence of commercial reasons, there may be political reasons rendering annexation desirable. Under existing conditions the Netherlands, which at one time were the classic fighting-ground of Europe, are no longer geographically of strategic importance. In the days when England engaged in Continental wars, and its armies fought side by side with the Germans against Louis XIV and Napoleon I, the Netherlands were the inevitable battle-field. But those times are past. Even if, contrary to all expectations, peace on the Continent should ever seriously be menaced, the Netherlands are completely out of the scope of the probable battle-ground. Therefore, strategic reasons are likewise untenable. Is it, then, to be supposed that the free and independent Netherlands constitute a political menace for Germany,—a menace which Germany logically would wish to anticipate by annexation?

No sensible person in Germany or in the Netherlands believes that any political combination could be concluded which, in a European conflict, could force the Netherlands into a coalition with England or France, directed against Germany. Only total ignorance of the condition of both nations, of their racial and historical relationship, the interests they have in common, can presuppose that the free and independent Netherlands can ultimately or eventually work a political injury to Germany. The initiated know that Germany is assured of the neutrality of the Netherlands, and Germany requires nothing but this neutrality.

Moreover, the persons who persist in attributing to Germany covetousness in the way of annexation, in regard to Holland, or Denmark, or the German provinces of Austria-Hungary—in spite of the fact that the history of German politics constitutes a monument to the contrary—totally misconstrue the spirit and purpose of the Constitution of the German Empire. Germany is not a federal state into which other states can be readily incorporated. The individual states, forming this federal state, are of greatly varying dimensions and importance, and consequently are represented in a congress of the united governments,—the Federal Council (*Bundesrath*)—with a varying number of votes.

Prussia, the largest of these states, has the most votes, and thus retains in the Federal Council (*Bundesrath*) the historical leadership which it has enjoyed since the Empire was founded. Upon this Prussian cornerstone the Empire is reared. The relation of the states to each other forms a tenacious, but complicated, equipoise-system, which, through being thus complicated, assumes a certain rigidity. The introduction of other states into the system, consequently, would not be a matter of small moment and would not be nearly as simple as the casual observer might suppose. The introduction of such a foreign body would lead many of the individual states to demand a reorganization of representation by votes in the Federal Council (*Bundesrath*). Such a reorganization, like every decisive modification of a Constitution, would at best be a most difficult and hazardous undertaking.

One must, therefore, ascribe to ignorance of German conditions the attitude of some chauvinistic papers of Western Europe in deliberately attempting to undermine Germany's reputation, particularly in the United States, and to inspire with fear the Danes, the Bohemians, the Austrians, the Hollanders, on the ground of a possibly impending union of their states with the German Empire, a union of which the German Empire is not in the least desirous, and which in Germany itself, even if desired, would encounter well-nigh insuperable difficulties.

I certainly do not believe that the fairy-tales of annexation originate in Belgium or Holland. Their sources are to be found elsewhere. The feeling of safety and assurance which each of these two states, in view of existing conditions, has in relation to the other, and logically must have, is exemplified in the close relations existing between them. These have become traditional. The closeness of these relations is guaranteed amply by parallel interests on both sides and by cultural and mental motives.

I believe the importance of the mental element in politics is habitually underestimated. Depending upon the racial divergences of different nations, these mental view-points may manifest themselves in various directions and in varying degrees of intensity. In general, it is safe to say that the peoples of the Germanic race are less swayed than others by momentary moods and by the elusive sentiments of the imagination; rather are they moved by a certain placid, historic continuity, a kind of loyalty

to their own history. Their development is not fitful and arbitrary, but calmer and more direct. They refrain from violating the traditions of their own history. Germans and Hollanders, independently of the racial relationship of their sentiments and their characteristics, possess a common mental history. In spite of sentimental longings for the South, the German artist ever remained aware of an abyss betwixt himself and the Southern masters, an abyss which even his sincerest admiration and most unswerving devotion could never completely bridge. There is no such abyss between himself and the Hollander. The atmosphere which they breathe, and which permeates their very souls, is the same. This may be of no importance in politics, but it serves as an illustration of a general unity of sentiment which evinces itself in every phase of life, and which reacts upon politics by far more than a materialistic age may be inclined to believe.

Upon each page of German history are inscribed the annals of the Netherlands, commemorating the same unquenchable thirst for freedom and independence that inspired ourselves. The mental activities of both nations have in particular been closely allied for centuries. The philosophy and literature of one country reacted upon the other. The two nations worked hand in hand.

Politically the same condition prevailed. I will not refer to earlier history, the assistance of the German States during the Spanish occupation, which the Electors of Brandenburg rendered the Netherlands, during the wars of Louis XIV. The history of the last century also perpetuates a similar unity of political interests and actions. The existence of the new kingdom of the Netherlands dates from the spring of the year 1814, when the Prussian troops forced the French to beat a retreat from Holland and Belgium. During the Congress of Vienna, when the Cabinets of the four Powers which successfully had combated Napoleon,—England, Austria, Prussia and Russia,—planned a reorganization of European affairs which had been put into such sad disarray by the French Emperor, these four Powers determined to establish the unified kingdom of Holland,—which was to include Belgium,—as a protective measure against a possibly recurring French desire for territorial aggrandizement; and it was then that the Prussian King, acting in accord with England's ministers, who desired to make amends for the loss of the two Dutch

colonies of Ceylon and the Cape by increasing the territory of the Netherlands on the Continent, served the best interests of the Netherlands because of the traditional friendship which had existed always between the two nations. In the year 1830, it was again the King of Prussia who gave the French to understand that any attempt on their part to annex Belgium, by taking advantage of the Brussels Revolution, would result speedily in war with Prussia. Thus independence was secured to the Belgians. At that time the Powers made a treaty, declaring the Kingdom of Belgium, which had been separated from the Netherlands, to be a neutral state. The object of this was to protect the little country from falling a prey to the territorial covetousness of some other nation, the case being similar to the episode of 1815, when the Allied Powers deemed it advisable to fortify strongly the western frontier of the Netherlands.

In the sixties, when Bismarck was hard at work on the unification of Germany, Napoleon III repeatedly offered the great German statesman to withdraw completely from interference in German internal affairs, in return for Belgium. This proposition Bismarck never even considered. Nor were the Belgians unmindful of the fact that, had Napoleon III been the victor at Sedan, they would have forfeited their independence.

However, I do not wish to overemphasize these matters, which belong to the past and to a wholly different political situation; nor do I wish to advance the claim that the Belgians entertain in regard to the pacific France of to-day fears similar to those which agitated them in the days of Napoleon III. Affairs have undergone a general reconstruction since then, and even the liveliest historical reminiscences scarcely would restrain Holland and Belgium from giving a different direction to their apprehensions, if there were any legitimate reasons for so doing. Nevertheless, the recollection of the intimate association of the peoples of Germany and the Netherlands and Germany and Belgium, during the past, will, in the absence of every legitimate reason, prevent these nations from imputing to each other enmity and ill will, but will promote instead an eminently sane, mutual cordiality, which, even if merely a matter of sentiment, will have effect upon their action and affairs.

I can only assume, therefore, that the baseless fear pertaining to a possible desire on Germany's part to annex Belgium or Hol-

land certainly does not emanate from Belgium or Holland, but from some place where persons, unacquainted with Germany and the Netherlands, blindly believe that the big German Empire simply must be possessed of an ambition to annex its two smaller neighbors.

It is possible that, after the war of 1870-1871, when Germany, which had been powerless and torn by centuries of dissensions, and which all Europe had been accustomed to consider a *quantité négligeable*, suddenly sprang to the front as a powerful, unified realm, some Hollanders and Belgians, viewing the unaccustomed situation, began to feel strange apprehensions lest the mighty, young state would abuse and not merely use its newly won strength. These apprehensions, however, soon crumbled away, and disappeared as a concomitant manifestation of a transition period.

To-day, however, the home of such apprehensions is neither Belgium nor Holland. Several years ago, a group of writers, inspired by influential politicians of some Powers of Western Europe, started a virulent campaign for a Holland-Belgium Alliance, indicated to be the only means of saving these states from threatened annexation by the German Emperor. It is possible that such politicians promulgated these views in good faith, and believed themselves to be acting in the interests of their own countries, by holding up the German bugaboo to all the small states and frightening them into seeking the protection of their own altruistic and less dangerous friendship.

At all events, the best refutation of the needlessness of this dread of annexation is the fact that the German bugaboo is not "made in Holland or Belgium," but is a strictly imported article.

STERNBURG.